

Creating. (FIG. 1A, D). The user invokes the program for the purpose of creating a bar code to be printed on the back of his or her business card. Refer to FIG. 2. The user keys in his or her own contact information; e.g. name, telephone numbers, address, email handle, and Uniform Resource Locator (URL). Alternatively, and more conveniently, the user may command the program to import his or her contact information from a PIM database.

As an important variation on this scenario, the user may be a commercial typesetter, or a professional employed by a commercial typesetter. In this case the user invokes the program to create a digital business card commissioned by a customer.

In addition to contact or PIM database information, the program allows the user to embed any digital object that is standard to computers. Such objects include, but are not limited to, photographs, audio and video tracks, and other programs. The number and size of such objects are governed by the digital capacity of the business card. This, in turn, is determined by the storage mechanism and capacity made available on the business card, and by the program's method of utilizing this storage.

At the behest of the user, the program creates a master copy of the digitally encoded business card, and displays a representation of this master copy. The program facilitates modification of this master copy, including, but not limited to, annotations about the information or objects to be encoded on the business card. FIG. 3 illustrates this behavior where the digitized information manifests as a bar code.

At the behest of the user, the program prepares and arranges one or more copies of master digital images for output to a physical medium. This includes business cards imprinted with a bar code, but may also include: holographic business cards, business cards which embed smart chips or integrated circuits, business cards with magnetic stripes, and business cards embodied as compact disks, perhaps rectangularly shaped. With respect to bar codes, in particular, the program prepares and formats copies of the master, or masters, for transfer via standard or novel paper-based printing methods (FIG. 4).

The latter include, but are not limited to, commercial printing presses or printers attached to computers or computer networks. With respect to the latter, in particular, the program enables the printing of copies of a master, or masters, to a sheet of self-stick labels, to a perforated sheet of business card blanks, or directly to the blank side of already printed business cards, inserted for that purpose into an aligning template.

The program can read and extract any information or object that it digitizes onto a business card. In a pervasive variant of the basic embodiment, the program runs compatibly on a number of computing platforms, transfers information to and from a broad spectrum of PIMs, and makes use of a wide variety of input and output devices and peripherals. The latter include, but are not restricted to, combinations of optical scanners, as well as paper-based printers. Unlike Smith '052, whose claims are restricted to pen or capped-pen reading devices, the present invention achieves flexible interaction over a broad spectrum of input devices. In a preferred embodiment as software, that is, the invention is largely independent of the packaging characteristics of the scanners, or other input devices, that it commands. By contrast with Desai '105, moreover, the present invention does not incorporate a PIM as part of a self-contained package. Indeed, duplicating the functionality of existing PIM's would, arguably, dilute the attractiveness of the present invention. On the other hand, the present invention *creates* digital business cards, while Desai '105 does not. In breadth and in depth, the present invention embodies a novel and useful process for facilitating and standardizing the exchange of digital information among people, by way of computers and business cards.

The invention having been described in preferred embodiments for creating and reading digital business cards, it should be apparent, especially in light of the foundation laid in the invention BACKGROUND, how to achieve analogous behavior for the case of digital forms and stationery.

It is understood that the invention is capable of further modification, uses and/or adaptations following in general the principle of the invention and including such departures from the present disclosure as come within known or customary practice in the art to which the invention pertains, and as may be applied to the essential features set forth, and fall within the scope of the invention, with specific claims enumerated as follows.

WE CLAIM:

1. A system for creating digital business cards, comprising means for capturing contact information, or information pertinent to computer applications which process such information; and digitizing said information into a master image, copies of which are suitable for printing onto paper stock.

2. A system for reading digital business cards, comprising means for scanning an image of digitized contact information, or information pertinent to computer applications which process such information; and converting and transferring that information into a PIM, or into computer applications which process such information.
3. The system recited in claim 1, with digital forms or stationery in addition to business cards.
4. The system recited in claim 2, with digital forms or stationery in addition to business cards.
5. A substantially interchangeable representation of the information and image recited in claim 3.
6. The system recited in claim 3, where the image is that of a bar code.
7. The system recited in claim 4, where the image is that of a bar code.
8. The representation recited in claim 5, where the image is that of a bar code.
9. The system recited in claim 3, with a master format in addition to a master image; and with the additional provision that copies of the master format be suitable for rendering onto magnetic or optical media, holographic media, or smart chips.
10. The system recited in claim 4, with the provision that, in addition to scanning an image, the system may read from magnetic or optical media, holographic media, or smart chips.
11. The representation recited in claim 5, where, in addition, the interchange subsumes magnetic or optical media, holographic media, or smart chips.
12. The system recited in claim 9, where the image is that of a bar code.
13. The system recited in claim 10, where the image is that of a bar code.
14. The representation recited in claim 11, where the image is that of a bar code.

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